



INFORMATION ABOUT DONATED VENISON AND CWD FOR PATRONS OF FOOD PANTRIES

This public food pantry offers venison donated by Wisconsin hunters through the Deer Donation Program. This program is administered by counties with the cooperation of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the United States Department of Agriculture. Because chronic wasting disease (CWD) has been found in a small percentage of Wisconsin deer, we are providing some basic information about CWD to ensure that you, the consumer, can make an informed choice in your selection of meat at the food pantry.

- ◆ CWD is a fatal disease that affects the nervous system of deer and elk. It has never been known to naturally affect any other species of animal. The disease is caused by an abnormal protein called a **prion**, which can survive heat which would usually destroy disease-causing germs. Prions concentrate in certain tissues, such as brain, spinal cord, lymph nodes, and spleen, although they may also be present in low concentrations in muscle tissue..
- ◆ Meat processors who are associated with the venison donation program are using boned-out meat from which most fat, connective tissue, and nerve tissue has been removed. In this way, the tissues where prions concentrate are not included in the processed venison.
- ◆ **CWD has never been shown to cause illness in humans.** However in Europe, a similar disease of cattle called BSE (also known as “mad cow disease”) is the cause of a fatal nervous system disease in some humans who have eaten tissues from infected cattle. Because we know that, at least in this one instance, an animal prion disease has been able to infect humans, **no one can predict with absolute certainty that CWD will never cause human disease.**
- ◆ Based on extensive testing, CWD appears to be almost totally confined to two areas in southern Wisconsin. The venison available at this food pantry does **NOT** come from these known CWD areas. In the remainder of Wisconsin outside of the known CWD areas, over 29,000 deer have been tested, and none have tested positive for CWD. **This means the chance that any venison available at this food pantry came from an infected deer is extremely small.**
- ◆ It is important to know that a negative test does not absolutely guarantee the deer is totally free of CWD prions, however, it is the best means currently available to detect CWD, and is the same test used in Europe to detect mad cow disease in cattle.

If you would like more information about CWD and its implications for human health, you can call the Wisconsin Division of Public Health at (608)267-9003 or go to the following internet site: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/communicable/factsheets/creutzfeldt.htm>